



Worker-Peasant Monument, Moscow

National-Scale Democracy

We have founded this study of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) on the practical necessity, as well as the historical fact, of class alliance, and most pointedly on Lenin's report to the 2CCI on 26 July 1920, on the National and Colonial Question.

A class alliance, or in other words, a popular front or a unity-in-action, was always necessary for the defeat of colonialism. Such class alliances were successfully put together in many countries, including South Africa, as the tactical road to strategic political independence.

Such an alliance is what is broadly known as a National Liberation Movement. What the movement is supposed to do is called the National Democratic Revolution. As much as it was nationalist, the anti-colonial liberation movement was equally international in character. The Worker-Peasant Alliance (hammer and sickle) is not just a Russian thing. It is universal.

The NDR's international dimension is solidarity with the National Liberation struggles of others, in the common fight against Imperialism.

Expansion of democracy

The National Democratic Revolution's national dimension was the enlargement of democracy. This the Imperialists invariably opposed with divide-and-rule schemes of provincial federation, regionalism, "Balkanisation" *et cetera*. Hence the continuing

struggle against Provincialism, and the on-going defence of Provincialism by the reactionary remnants in our country, South Africa, today.

We now need to look specifically at the expansion of democracy to the national level. Why? Because, for revolutionary purposes, the entire working class, and the entirety of the allied classes, must unite all of their potential support, in numerical, and in territorial terms. This is a practical necessity, if the liberation forces are to defeat the well-concentrated class enemy which is the monopoly and Imperialist-allied bourgeoisie, organised at the national level as a class dictatorship.

The battle to spread democracy to the farthest corners of the country, and to the whole population in terms of class, race and gender, is also the battle against regional and ethnic chauvinism. This effort aims to create a centralised parliamentary democracy, or democratic republic, even if, as Lenin pointed out in the report to the 2CCI, such a democratic republic can only be bourgeois in nature - at first.

The structure of parliamentary democracy (i.e. the democratic republic) is the organising scheme within which the polity at the national scale is conceived and arranged. It is not sufficient in itself. It is a shell that must be populated with organised elements, elements which must also be extended to the national scale, just as much as the parliamentary franchise is.

Among these organised elements are:

- The mass movement of national liberation
- The vanguard party of the working class
- The national (industrial) trade unions and their national centre
- Class-conscious national media of communication
- Many mass organisations at the national level, including Womens' and Youth organisations.

Communists can be found organising, educating and mobilising, as is their duty according to the SACP Constitution, in all of these areas, and this has been the case throughout the 90 years of the Party's life. The texts that are collected together in the linked document below clearly demonstrate that the communists, even before the formation of the Party, were concerned with the extension of organisation to all parts of the population.

Early years of the Communist Party of South Africa and the ANC

The attached document, which is itself a compilation, shows that one predominately-white precursor of the Party was acutely aware that its own aspirations could not be fulfilled unless the Black Proletariat was mobilised to take the lead in the struggle. This was the International Socialist League. It, like Lenin, had opposed the Imperialist war that

broke out in 1914. It was later to become a component part of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) on its formation in 1921. "No Labour Movement without the Black Proletariat," it said.

After its 1921 formation, the Party quickly became predominantly black in membership, and the black cadres soon exercised a leading role in mass organisations, of which the biggest, in the 1920s, was the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), formed in 1919. Note that the (white) Labour Party had been formed in 1908, and the African National Congress in 1912.

The expulsion of communists from the ICU, and in particular of **J.A. (Jimmy) La Guma**, ICU General Secretary; **E.J. Khaile**, ICU Financial Secretary and **John Gomas**, Cape Provincial Secretary, was a set-back for the working class and as it turned out, it was fatal for the ICU. This episode is also recorded in the attached document.

In 1927 **Josia Gumede** was elected ANC President and he travelled to meet the top leadership of the Soviet Union. That year was the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution. He travelled with Jimmy La Guma, a member of the party, secretary of an ANC branch in Cape Town and a recently-expelled leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). La Guma was expelled by the ICU together with E.J Khaile for being communists. In that very same year Khaile was elected Secretary-General of the ANC at its national conference in 1927.

The CPSA and the ANC drew closer together, though not without problems. But the alliance was endorsed by the Sixth Comintern Congress in the famous "**Black Republic Thesis**" resolution, which said among others:

*"The Party should pay particular attention to the embryonic national organisations among the natives, such as the **African National Congress**. The Party, while retaining its full independence, should participate in these organisations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity...*

"In the field of trade union work the Party must consider that its main task consists in the organisation of the native workers into trade unions as well as propaganda and work for the setting up of a South African trade union centre embracing black and white workers.

"The Communist Party cannot confine itself to the general slogan of 'Let there be no whites and no blacks'. The Communist Party must understand the revolutionary importance of the national and agrarian questions.

*"A correct formulation of this task and intensive propagation of the chief slogan of a **native republic** will result not in the alienation of the white workers from the*

Communist Party, not in segregation of the natives, but, on the contrary, in the building up of a solid united front of all toilers against capitalism and imperialism.”

The famous **Cradock Letter** was written by Moses Kotane in 1934, five years before he became General Secretary of the Party. It called for the “Africanisation or Afrikanisation” of the CPSA, something that had clearly not yet fully taken place in 1934, five years after the adoption of the “Black Republic Thesis”.



Genesis of the NDR

The Hammer and Sickle emblem of the communists, invented in 1917, is a symbol of class alliance between two distinct classes: proletarian workers, and peasants.

Peasants often work hard and they are often poor, but they are not the same as the working proletariat of the towns. Nor are they the same as the rural proletariat.

So the hammer and the sickle are not two equal things. They represent two different things, allied.

Practical class politics is always a matter of alliance, and in different circumstances, different alliances are called for. Communists commonly regard an alliance between workers and peasants as normal. But proletarian parties have also, in the past, attempted class alliances with parts of the petty-bourgeoisie or national bourgeoisie, against feudalism or against colonialism.

Alliances are normal and necessary, in order to isolate and thereby to defeat an adversary, and equally, to avoid being isolated and defeated by the adversary. Therefore, the question of the appropriate alliances in the anti-colonial and anti-Imperialist struggle was bound to arise.

The origin of the specific type of class alliance that is nowadays referred to by the term **National Democratic Revolution** can be precisely located in the Second Congress of the Communist International (2CCI), in the discussion on the National & Colonial Question, reported by V. I. Lenin on 26 July 1920 (attached), less than three years after the Great October Revolution in Russia, a revolution based on a worker-peasant alliance.

The founding Congress of the Communist International (“Comintern”) took place in March, 1919, a little more than a year after that October 1917 Russian Revolution, of which it was an integral consequence. The setting up of the Communist International was a demand that was part of Lenin’s [“April Theses”](#).

The first “International Working Men’s Association”, of which Karl Marx had been a founder member in 1864, had fallen into disrepair after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. Its successor, the Second International, fell apart in 1914, when most of the Social-Democratic workers’ parties backed the bourgeois masters of war in the conflict between the Imperialist powers.

The communists, led by Lenin, had held out against that betrayal. After the revolutionary victory in Russia they lost very little time before constructing a new International. The Third, Communist International was naturally and explicitly anti-Imperial and anti-colonial, but it explicitly, carefully, and out of necessity, extended the revolutionary alliance to include parts of the bourgeoisie.

In his report to the 2CCI on the National & Colonial Question, Lenin says: *“We have discussed whether it would be right or wrong, in principle and in theory, to state that the Communist International and the Communist parties must support the bourgeois-democratic movement in backward countries. As a result of our discussion, we have arrived at the unanimous decision to speak of the **national-revolutionary movement** rather than of the ‘bourgeois-democratic’ movement. It is beyond doubt that any national movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement, since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consist of **peasants who represent bourgeois-capitalist relationships**... However, the objections have been raised that, if we speak of the bourgeois-democratic movement, we shall be obliterating all distinctions between the reformist and the revolutionary movements. Yet that distinction has been very clearly revealed of late in the backward and colonial countries...”*

In this report we find, for the first time, all the makings of the NDR, including the name, even if the words are not quite in their present-day order. Lenin calls it “national-revolutionary”, but he makes it very clear that he is talking of a democratic class alliance with anti-colonial, anti-Imperialist elements of the national bourgeoisie in colonial countries.

The 2CCI was followed within two months by the famous “[Congress of the Peoples of the East](#)”, in Baku, in the southern part of what was soon to become the Soviet Union. This 1920 event was the first international anti-colonial conference, and it had huge consequences. We will deal with the Congress of the Peoples of the East in the next instalment, as an optional contribution to the discussion of the birth of the NDR as a concept, which had been laid down in Lenin’s report.



[Mao Zedong, 1893-1976](#)

People's Democratic Dictatorship

Mao stood in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, on 1 October 1949, to declare the founding of the People’s Republic of China. And also in 1949, Mao wrote of the People’s Democratic Dictatorship. In this document Mao rehearsed some of the history, for example:

“Imperialist aggression shattered the fond dreams of the Chinese about learning from the West. It was very odd - why were the teachers always committing aggression against their pupil? The Chinese learned a good deal from the West, but they could not make it work and were never able to realize their ideals. Their repeated struggles, including such a country-wide movement as the Revolution of 1911, all ended in failure. Day by day, conditions in the country got worse, and life was made impossible.”

In 2012, Africans can still feel the truth of these words in relation to their own experience.

In 2013, sixty-four years after the revolution, China is still called a People’s Republic, and not a socialist republic. Why is this? How is it constituted?

The Chinese nation is constructed in terms of its political economy. Mao is very clear about this, for example in the following passage:

“Who are the people? At the present stage in China, they are the working class, the peasantry, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These classes, led by the working class and the Communist Party, unite to form their own state and elect their own government; they enforce their dictatorship over the running dogs of imperialism - the landlord class and bureaucrat-bourgeoisie, as well as the representatives of those classes, the Kuomintang reactionaries and their accomplices - suppress them, allow them only to behave themselves and not to be unruly in word or deed. If they speak or act in an unruly way, they will be promptly stopped and punished. Democracy is practised within the ranks of the people, who enjoy the rights of freedom of speech, assembly, association and so on. The right to vote belongs only to the people, not to the reactionaries. **The combination of these two aspects, democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries, is the people's democratic dictatorship.**”

In 2009, according to information from a Chinese delegation then touring South Africa, the number of people living in the rural areas of China was still 800 million, but the number of people in Chinese cities was by then 500 million, an enormous increase on the three million “modern industrial workers” counted by Mao in 1939.

The South African NDR

As we become more aware of what is happening, it becomes apparent that the National Democratic Revolution should never be seen as a regrettable compromise, or as a temporary or an interim measure, or even as a stage, if a stage means a halt.

The National Democratic Revolution is a positive, revolutionary move forward. It is the only direct move forward that is possible, in our circumstances, that can be accomplished in a conscious, peaceful, deliberate and rational way. This is because the NDR corresponds to the political economy of the country, and because development is class struggle.

The National Democratic Revolutions cannot properly be defined by a set of tick-boxes next to self-justifying stand-alone goods such as “non-racial”, “non-sexist” and “unified”, as much as those things may be desirable in the abstract.

The nature of the NDR and its consequent trajectory can only be properly and fully seen in the light of Political Economy. The NDR should always be defined, and from time to time redefined, in relation to a specific class alliance for unity-in-action.



J B Marks, 1903-1972

Congress, Pact and Defiance

The National Democratic Revolution is more than a theory; it has a history. In South Africa, the unity of the vanguard party, the mass democratic liberation movement, and workers' industrial unions, was created by the actions of countless individuals in the course of many historic events.

In terms of South African history we have already noted, among others, the formation of the ANC in 1912, the ICU in 1919, and the SACP in 1921. We have considered the Black Republic Thesis, Moses Kotane's Cradock Letter, and the sectarian problems of the CPSA in the 1930s. The Party had already begun to solve some of these problems by the time South Africa became part of the war of 1939-1945.

We will mostly refer, from now on, to South African events, yet it is as well to keep in mind that the National Democratic revolutionary wave was a world-wide historic change. NDRs swept old-style colonialism almost completely off the face of the planet in the decades following the Second World War.

Thanks partly to the [Comintern](#) and to [Georgi Dimitrov](#), the World War that began in 1939 was to a great extent a conscious unity-in-action against the fascists. It is true that the Comintern was wound up on 15 May, 1943, but by that time the international anti-fascist alliance was in place.

The war came to an end in August, 1945, and the United Nations came into being on 24 October 1945, with a membership of 51 nations. Sixty-seven years later, and as a direct consequence of multiple, worldwide National Democratic Revolutions, UN membership is approaching 200 independent nations – nearly four times as many as there were in 1945.

A lot of organising had been done in the relatively more favourable conditions in South Africa during the anti-fascist war. Among the structures that came into existence were

the Transvaal Council of Non-European Trade Unions, and the African Mine Workers' Union, one of whose leaders was J B Marks [pictured above].

A lot was in place, yet action was required that would convert the preparations into permanent, historical and revolutionary facts. The historic action that fulfilled this role in the first place was the African Mineworkers' Strike of September, 1946.

[Writing in 1976](#), M P Naicker described how the African Mineworkers' Strike changed everything, both within South Africa, and also externally:

"The African miners' strike was one of those historic events that, in a flash of illumination, educate a nation, reveal what has been hidden and destroy lies and illusions. The strike transformed African politics overnight.

"Dr. A. B. Xuma, President-General of the African National Congress, joined a delegation of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) sent to the 1946 session of the United Nations General Assembly when the question of the treatment of Indians in South Africa was raised by the Government of India. He, together with the SAIC representatives - H. A. Naidoo and Sorabjee Rustomjee - and Senator H. M. Basner, a progressive white 'Native Representative' in the South African Senate, used the occasion to appraise Member States of the United Nations of the strike of the African miners and other aspects of the struggle for equality in South Africa.

"Dealing with this visit the ANC, at its annual conference from December 14 to 17, 1946, passed the following resolution:

"Congress congratulates the delegates of India, China and the Soviet Union and all other countries who championed the cause of democratic rights for the oppressed non-European majority in South Africa."

"The brave miners of 1946 gave birth to the ANC Youth League's Programme of Action adopted in 1949; they were the forerunners of the freedom strikers of May 1, 1950, against the Suppression of Communism Act, and the tens of thousands who joined the 26 June nation-wide protest strike that followed the killing of sixteen people during the May Day strike. They gave the impetus for the 1952 Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws when thousands of African, Indian and Coloured people went to jail; they inspired the mood that led to the upsurge in 1960 and to the emergence of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) - the military wing of the African National Congress."

We will proceed to the Doctors' Pact and then to the Defiance Campaign that was mounted following the banning of the CPSA in 1950. After that, we will go to the Freedom Charter campaign of the mid-1950s. In all of this we are seeing the NDR as a revolutionary class alliance that is democratic in both form and content.



Naicker, Xuma, Dadoo

Three Doctors' Pact

"This Joint Meeting declares its sincerest conviction that for the future progress, goodwill, good race relations, and for the building of a united, greater and free South Africa, full franchise rights must be extended to all sections of the South African people..."

This second document in the fifth part of the CU NDR series is a transcript of the "Three Doctors' Pact" of March, 1947. It was a historic pact for democracy and for national liberation, as the above quotation from it shows. There had been nothing like it before.

The three doctors were Dr A B Xuma, Dr Yusuf Dadoo, and Dr Monty Naicker, leaders of the ANC, the Transvaal Indian Congress, and the Natal Indian Congress respectively [Picture: Dr Xuma signing; Dr Dadoo is seen on the right side of the picture, Dr Monty Naicker on the other side].

This Pact was a precursor of the Women's Charter of 1954 and of the Freedom Charter of 1955, including the latter's volunteer campaign prior to the Congress of the People and its succeeding campaign of publication after the signing of the Freedom Charter.

The Pact declares *"the urgency of cooperation between the non-European peoples and other democratic forces."* It demanded *"Equal economic and industrial rights and opportunities and the recognition of African trade unions under the Industrial Conciliation Act."*

In other words, it goes beyond the immediate business of unity of African and Indian organizations, and quite explicitly leads the reader towards the grouping of democratic forces that was to be further developed into the Congress of the People eight years later, and into the product of that assembly: The Freedom Charter.

In all of these cases we can see that mass organisations of specific constituencies were able to combine as part of a process of national social development; and more precisely, towards a National Democratic Revolution.

This Doctors' Pact made a direct reference to the gains of the anti-fascist war, during which South Africa had been allied with the Soviet Union, among others, as follows: *"every effort [must] be made to compel the Union Government to implement the United Nations' decisions and to treat the Non-European peoples in South Africa in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter."*

To this end the Pact determined that *"a vigorous campaign be immediately launched."*

Reaction was closing in. The quasi-fascist and racist National Party was elected to a majority the all-white Parliament in 1948. The Communist Party of South Africa, later reborn as the clandestine South African Communist Party (SACP), finally legalised again in 1990, was banned in 1950. The consequence of this banning was the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign when the ANC rallied to the defence of the Party, while the Trade Union Movement grew towards the foundation of SACTU in 1955, just in time for it to take part in the Congress of the People.

Many other diverse and historic events took place in the decade between the end of the anti-fascist world war in 1945 and the Congress of the People in 1955, but the general movement is clear: towards a National Democratic Revolution, based on the unity-in-action of the workers' Party, the united national liberation movement, and the organised mass trade union movement.



[Henry Nxumalo, 1917-1957](#)

Defiance Campaign

The given document on the Defiance Campaign was written by the famous "Drum" reporter, Henry Nxumalo [pictured above].

In 1950, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was banned, dissolved itself, and gradually began to reconstitute itself as a clandestine party, the SACP. The Communist Party made no further public statements until 1959, when the first issue of the African Communist magazine was published.

But two other things happened: the remaining, legal components of the movement rallied round to protest against the banning, and to support the formerly-CPSA comrades, such as Dadoo, Marks, Bopape and Kotane, as reported by Henry Nxumalo a few months later in the Drum magazine.



The movement was solid. The ANC did not wash off the communists. The NDR was already on firm foundations. The Defiance Against Unjust Laws campaign was led by Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela among others. Mandela was that campaign's Volunteer-in-Chief.

The lead up to this episode is also described in Govan Mbeki's 1992 book "[The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa](#)". At the beginning of Chapter 7 of that book, Mbeki recalls the joint ANC/CPSA protest against the Suppression of Communism Act on May Day 1950, and the massacre of 18 people on that day by the National Party regime that had come to power in 1948. This is something all South Africans should remember on the May Day holiday each year.

Consequent to this massacre, 26 June 1950 was observed with a stay-away as Freedom Day.

Two years later, the same day, 26 June, was used for the launch of the Defiance of Unjust Laws campaign in 1952, and it was used again in 1955 when the [Freedom Charter](#) was adopted on that date at the Congress of the People in Kliptown.

Note that 26 June, our original Freedom Day, having to do with the protests against the banning of the Communist Party, is not a Public Holiday in South Africa. 24 September was made a public "Heritage Day" holiday at the insistence of the Inkatha Freedom Party (see [here](#)).



Congress of the People, Kliptown

Congress Call

This item is about the preparations, from 1953 onwards for the 1955 Congress of the People (CoP); the Congress of the People as a definite event; and the Freedom Charter that came out of that event, all considered as historic acts and as part of the process of building the South African National Democratic Revolution (NDR).

What could very advantageously be used for this discussion is an electronic copy of the book by Jeremy Cronin and Raymond Suttner, published in 1986, called “30 Years of the Freedom Charter”, or even just a good extract from the book. But unfortunately the book is not available on the Internet. Instead, it has been polished up and re-published as “50 Years of the Freedom Charter”, in hard copy only. If you can get either one of these editions, do use it to prepare for this discussion.

“The Congress of the People and Freedom Charter Campaign”, by Ismail Vadi, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1995, is another book that comes up in searches of the Internet.

According to the small samples of Vadi’s book that can be read on line, (i.e. the [Introduction](#), the [Preface](#), and the [Foreword](#) by Walter Sisulu) the planning of the CoP began in 1953, and the campaign was only wound down in 1956, the year of the beginning of the Treason Trial, which was a consequence of the CoP. The Treason Trial continued until 1961, by which time all the defendants had been acquitted.

Another document on the Internet is a short [History of the Freedom Charter](#) on the “non-partisan” South African History Online web site, funded by the Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and other liberal philanthropists. “Non-partisan” in the case of SAHO therefore tends to mean that the Communist Party is mentioned as little as possible. Nevertheless, these pages bear out the extended nature of the political intervention that was the total CoP Campaign, a campaign that was a clear extension of

the National Democratic Revolution policy of the recently-banned CPSA and of the Comintern before it, since 1920.

The CoP/Freedom Charter campaign was a determined and deliberately visible construction of a national democratic project. It involved huge masses of people. It was a conscious and fully worked-out design, even to the Nehru-style caps in ANC colours that the Volunteers wore. [See the photo above showing the platform at Kliptown, with a Volunteer in attendance]



There is an error in the SAHO text: There were five organisations involved, not four. SACTU, the non-racial South African Congress of Trade Unions, was a late entry to the CoP but it made the cut and it managed to feature in the “wheel of unity” that nowadays still forms part of both COSATU’s and the ANC’s logos.

The second image shows the document that was used to publicise the Freedom Charter after the Congress, including the newly-pasted “SACTU” acronym, and the “ANC” acronym shifted from the rim to the hub of the wheel. The document includes quotes from the Freedom Charter itself.

This series is about the NDR. This post and the reading are given so as to invite you to consider the whole episode of the CoP campaign from 1953 to 1956, and the subsequent struggle around the Treason Trial, as one of the strongest specific and historical contributions to the NDR.

The document “Call to the Congress of the People” is included. It was a mobilising flyer or pamphlet and it shows very clearly the large scope and scale of the call to “all Unionwide Organisations”.

The Freedom Charter was much more than a list of demands. It was an integral part of a kind of conscious nation-building which had real revolutionary content and which demonstrated real democracy in action.

Those old comrades laid down an irresistible pattern. It appealed to the heart as well as to the eye and to the mind, and it still surrounds us today, manifested in the continuing Congress Alliance of which the SACP, legal once more, is now an open part. There was never a time when the communists were not part of the National Democratic Revolution. It is ours, as much as it is anybody else's. It is family.

As it was when Lenin spoke to the [Second Congress of the Communist International in 1920](#), so it was in 1955. Two things were required. One was a genuine class alliance and unity-in-action against the main oppressor class, the colonialist monopoly capitalists. The other was the deliberate extension of democracy for the creation of a democratic nation. The CoP campaign was exactly in this mould.



[Hilda Bernstein, 1915-2006](#); [Rusty Bernstein, 1920-2002](#)

Road to South African Freedom

The National Democratic Revolution, is a project whose origins can be found [at least 90 years ago](#), and which has a continuous history from that time onwards, both outside and inside South Africa.

We have traced some of the main steps of the NDR in South Africa and we have consequently touched upon some of the following: the Black Republic Thesis; the Cradock Letter; the Doctors' Pact; the Defiance Campaign; the Congress of the People and the Freedom Charter; the Peasants' Revolt, and the Strategy and Tactics document of the Morogoro, Tanzania conference of the ANC in 1969.

The Treason Trial that followed the Congress of the People came to an end in 1959 with the acquittal of all the defendants. In the same year, the African Communist magazine was launched from exile. It was the first public manifestation of the South African

Communist Party, re-established and renamed after the banning and dissolution of the CPSA in 1950.

Between 1959 and the 1969 Morogoro Conference, a number of things happened. New campaigns were launched, but came to an abrupt end following the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of the ANC and the PAC in 1960. Umkhonto we Sizwe was launched in 1961. The raid on Liliesleaf Farm in Rivonia took place in 1963. It was a great setback to the movement.

The SACP published the Road to South African Freedom in 1962. It is probably the first published document of the SACP, apart from a few quarterly editions of the African Communist (the “AC”) that had appeared up to that time.

The Road to South African Freedom is about National Democratic Revolution. This can be seen from its section specifically on the NDR, where the document spells out that:

*“This crisis can only be resolved by a revolutionary change in the social system which will overcome these conflicts by putting an end to the colonial oppression of the African and other non-White people. The immediate and imperative interests of all sections of the South African people demand the carrying out of such a change, a **national democratic revolution...**”*



[Blade Nzimande](#); [Jeremy Cronin](#)

Transformation, Not a Balancing Act

“We Need Transformation, Not a Balancing Act”, published in 1997, the year following the beginning of what has since become known as the “1996 Class Project”, of which the document is an initial critique.

The SACP and the ANC had been legalised in 1990, the UDF had been disbanded, the CODESA talks had taken place, SACP General Secretary Chris Hani had been assassinated,

the ANC had been elected to government in 1994, and Joe Slovo had passed away on 6 January 1995. All of this triumph and tragedy, and a lot more, constituted part of the National Democratic Revolution, not least the building of the ANC and the SACP as legal, open, organised structures around this large country with its population of approximately 40 million in the mid-1990s (now over 50 million).

This SACP document looked at a number of other documents published at that time, including from the ANC Youth League, from COSATU, and from the SACP itself, but in particular from the ANC in the form of a November, 1996 document called "[The State and Social Transformation](#)" (note that the Young Communist League was not re-established until 2003).

Nzimande and Cronin were saying that the ANC document stood out from the others in terms of its class-neutral "balancing act" approach. They conclude that the document should rather have been called "The State and Social Accommodation".

Another way of putting this would be to say that the ANC document in question was selling class collaboration and not class alliance. "The State and Social Transformation" was selling the end of class struggle instead of the prosecution of the class struggle by alliance with favourable forces, and against unfavourable forces.

There is a difficulty in Nzimande's and Cronin's document. On the third page, under "Dealing with capital", two conceptions of capital are described: "factors of production" and "capital meaning capitalists". The authors say that in the ANC document these two conceptions are elided or confused, giving the impression that factors of production can only come attached to capitalists, which is not so.

That is all well and good, but what is absent is the understanding of capital as a dynamic relationship, and the "accumulation" of capital as being the reproduction of that relationship and of all of the support to that relationship, including the grooming of the working class and the dominance of banks and markets.

Even in terms of pure money, what the capitalist essentially does with it is to throw it into circulation, not hoard it. Unlike the accumulated wealth of the miser, which is not capital, though it may be money.

The circulation of money as capital proceeds via the purchase of labour-power and the extraction of surplus-value. Therefore, we do not escape the reproduction of capital by making the state the owner of the capital.

The revolutionary escape from capital is achieved by accumulating the prerequisites of socialism, which mainly consist of the ever-increasing ability of masses of people to

resolve and act together, consciously, and scientifically. This is the “Democratic” part of the National Democratic Revolution.

Nzimande’s and Cronin’s document does arrive at this point. It does, at the end, confirm that the free-willing collective Subject is both the maker and the product of revolution.

UMSEBENZI ONLINE

What is the National Democratic Revolution?

Blade Nzimande, General Secretary, Umsebenzi Online, 18 October 2006

This document, published in Umsebenzi Online in October 2006, a few months before the SACP’s 12th Congress and just under a year prior to the historic Polokwane 52nd National Conference of the ANC, is worth reading very closely.

The document is a polemic against the class-collaborationist construction of the NDR and a thorough re-statement of the class-conscious National Democratic Revolution theory.

It is therefore a fitting text with which to bring to a head, any discussion of the NDR.

The third page of the text includes the following paragraphs, which also serve to remind us that the 9th Congress of COSATU had taken place about a month earlier:

“In our messages to the COSATU Congress, we argued that the main content of the class struggles underway in society, as manifested in contemporary debates both inside and outside of our movement, is the direction that our democratic revolution should take, capitalist or a socialist orientation. We argued at this congress, as we had always done, that a national democratic revolution with a capitalist orientation ceases to be an NDR.

“Clearly from our last bilateral with the ANC through to President Mbeki's political overview to the October 2006 ANC National Executive Committee meeting, divergent views on the NDR have become self-evident. It is indeed possible that the emergence of the question of the SACP's relation to state power, including considerations of contesting elections in our own right, emanates from concerns within our ranks about the content and direction of the national democratic revolution since the 1994 democratic breakthrough.

“The character, content and direction of the NDR are of fundamental importance to our alliance, since the deepening and consolidating the national democratic revolution is the

glue that holds our Alliance together. It is therefore of utmost importance that we continue to debate these matters.

“For the SACP, especially since the adoption of the Native Republic Thesis of 1928 ('A struggle for a native republic as a stage towards a socialist South Africa'), we had always understood the national democratic revolution as the most direct route to socialism. The latter perspective was fully elaborated in our 1962 programme, 'The Road to South African Freedom'.”

This is a problematising article, which can also serve to concretise our discussion of the NDR, and leave its internal contradictions laid bare, if not resolved.



[Joe Slovo, 1926 - 1995](#)

SA Working Class and the NDR

In 1976, the document “[The Enemy Hidden Under the Same Colour](#)” was published following the treachery and the consequent expulsion from the ANC of the “Gang of Eight”.

Later the same year the “Soweto uprising” of youth began and spread all over the country.

Trade Unionism re-expanded from the early 1970s with strike waves in Durban and in the Witwatersrand where the watershed Carletonville Massacre took place in 1973. FOSATU, a syndicalist-led federation, was formed in 1979. It gave way to the National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance-aligned COSATU in 1985.

The United Democratic Front was launched in 1983.

All of these activities, amounting to the creation of living, democratic structures on a national scale, typify the National Democratic Revolution. They showed precisely how

organisation into democratic structures formed the relentless collective Subject of History that then became impossible to resist.

Joe Slovo published "[The SA Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution](#)" (see the link below) in 1988 at a time when he was the General Secretary of the SACP. The Party was still clandestine; the end of its 40-year period of enforced illegality was to come two years later. Like many political documents, this one takes shape around a polemical response to contemporary opponents who may no longer be well remembered. In this case it was the particular "workerists" and compromisers of the time that Slovo mentions on the first page of the document.

But as with the polemics of Marx, Engels and Lenin, in the course of the argument against otherwise long-forgotten foes, Slovo was obliged to set up a fully concrete, rounded assessment of the meaning of the NDR, which still remains today as the best single and definitive text on this matter; he succeeded brilliantly.

Slovo quickly establishes the class-alliance basis of the NDR and quotes Lenin saying that: *"the advanced class ... should fight with... energy and enthusiasm for the cause of the whole people, at the head of the whole people"*.

This advanced class is the working class.

Slovo goes on to write of the continuity of the NDR and of the institutional organising work that produces the bricks-and-mortar of nation-building.
